

There was no objection.

HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, first let me say that my thoughts and prayers go out to those who have lost loved ones and those who have suffered as a result of the destruction of this devastating natural disaster. I represent South Florida, an area that is far too often in the cone of error of just about every hurricane that approaches the United States and also home to the last time a Category 5 storm hit a United States territory.

As I speak here tonight, it is unclear how many people have been killed or will ultimately die as a result of this storm. What is clear is that America has received a wake-up call, and it came in the form of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina calls into question our preparedness as a Nation to deal with any kind of major disaster, whether it is a natural disaster or a disaster resulting from a terrorist attack.

This month marks the fourth anniversary of the September 11 attack on our Nation. Our country saw the devastation that could be caused by a terrorist attack, recognized our vulnerabilities and supposedly set about the task of protecting Americans as best we could from disaster. The administration knew about the vulnerabilities of the levees in New Orleans. They knew about the level of poverty that exists in the Gulf States that would hamper evacuation plans, and they should have known at a minimum the day before the hurricane hit that they would need more law enforcement, rescue, medical and evacuation personnel.

And herein lies the problem: They knew about these problems as we know about many problems and vulnerabilities that exist throughout other cities nationwide, yet we have been slow to act to improve the situation. I represent a city, the City of Miami, which is the third poorest in the Nation. In prior years, local officials in New Orleans recommended a plan that would have cost \$14 billion to reinforce the levee and pump system that keeps New Orleans safe. The State of Louisiana sent out a call for help that the project was too big, and they needed Federal assistance to even begin the project. And the pleas for help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress.

Let us put the New Orleans levee construction into perspective. We spend over \$1 billion a week on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we just handed out \$14 billion to oil companies in President Bush's energy bill we passed this summer. What is the ultimate lesson of Katrina? The lesson is

that the officials that were supposed to provide support, safety and security to the people in the Gulf States failed. The result was a situation where every emergency coordinator knew that disaster was imminent. However, the existing emergency infrastructure was not there to remove people from harm's way, and by doing so, it could have saved their lives.

We cannot as local, State and Federal officials draw up plans, have a 1-day mock disaster drill, and then pat ourselves on the back and say our job is done here. The government is here to provide the infrastructure that is necessary to prevent deaths from imminent disaster and step in immediately afterwards to ensure that deaths do not result from the destruction caused by that disaster. I think that the response from the Federal Government fell far short of that standard.

The lesson that Hurricane Katrina needs to have taught our government officials is that the current emergency management infrastructure could not handle a disaster the size of Katrina, and that we must streamline and reform our disaster preparedness and response. And we have to do it today. Our Nation's first priority should be to provide security, safety and infrastructure here at home. It is a disgrace that it took a disaster of such magnitude to bring light to the weaknesses of our system, and we must take the lessons learned to ensure that such catastrophes do not occur again.

At the very least, we need not have our leaders respond in the fashion that the President and the Speaker of the House and a number of other leaders have in the last 10 days, indicating that perhaps they did not think New Orleans should be rebuilt and perhaps the people who did not get out of New Orleans made a bad decision.

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We need to think about the wherewithal that people in these communities had prior to the storm, and we need to give them that wherewithal to move forward and go on so we can rebuild New Orleans and make sure that we never have to stare down a hurricane the magnitude of Katrina and not be prepared as we were in this storm.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WESTMORELAND). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. POE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EMANUEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURGESS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. CUMMINGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BROWN of Ohio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GENE GREEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BLUMENAUER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)